Hewlett Come to Sixty Year

WILTSHIRE ESSAYS. By Maurice Hewlett. Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press.

IN a delightful little book, friendly in the hand and gently edifying to the mind, Mr. Maurice Hewlett collects some thirty-odd of his short contributions to reviews and newspapers under the title "Wiltshire Essays." In his preface he says he calls them so "because they were all written in my country and many of them are directly concerned with it. Some of them deal with the doings of my neighbors as I view them from here; some deal with literature as I think about it here."

This prefatory chapter has the heading "On Oneself," and in it Mr. Hewlett comments with fairly good humor upon the general determination of the public to expect everything he writes to refer back, somehow, to "The Forest Lovers," though more than twenty-five years have passed since he sang the praises of youth in Italy. He alludes, ruefully, to somebody who expected to find "a swashbuckling romance" in one of his new books. (Surely Mr Hewlett should be generous enough to forgive a reader so suffused with a glorious and gleeful memory of "Brazenhead the Great" that he longed for more!) "I have been told," says he, "that a man changes the entire habit of his body periodically in a term of years. May he not change his mind? Must he not, if he is to keep pace? I don't say that he should do it as often as Mr. Wells, who seems to change his opinions with his shirt; but in twenty-five or thirty years he should have shifted, or man is a limpet."

He goes on, in a tolerant crescendo of humility, to confess his growing—and now accomplished—insensitiveness, in some degree, to criticism of details, ending with the sentence: "'Lord, what is man?' That is the cry when you are sixty." If it be true that a weight of years actually bears upon his head, let him remember that other sexagenarians run of the opinion that they are approaching "the last of life for which the first was planned," and are quite set upon keeping a twinkle in their seeing eye, even if it be sometimes hidden from the general by the obtrusive machinery of the optician.

These polished pieces of writing, the expression of a cultivated man's maturity, range through literature, politics and the various aspects of human life, seen with truest perception. He sees straight, and his eye is clear. Most of these chapters sound like the unconscious precipitate of years spent in sympathetic watching all sorts and conditions of the "plain people," in Lincoln's phrase. His point of view is that of the detached observer only in that the educated man instinctively beholds intellectually, however generous and overflowing may be his sympathy with and genuine affection for the glint of gold in humanity whenever he sees it; and it is often enough. He sees fundamentals; in such a perception as "Manege," the strong virtue of handiwork—no less than in the gayer pages of "The Great Affair" or "Select Conversations with a Blackbird." And this is why his hope and faith in England's future turn, surely as the sunflower, to what he calls the peasantry of England. An American somehow always thinks of those groups of the people as yeomanry rather than as peasants. For there is a difference. His moments of confusion in what God allows to happen are reflected in "The Children Who Ran Away," in "Faith and Works at Present" and, perhaps, in "The One Thing Needful"; his rambles among the ballads are his holiday making. But now and again he returns to his country people with a long breath and a quieter mind. In "The Remnant," as well as in "Our First and Last," his tone is confident and calm as the quiet of Wiltshire.

In this latter chapter he takes issue with the dean of St. Paul's, who says that the well born in England will not have families for fear of being poorer; the low born, degenerates, out of works, vicious, rickety and feeble minded will go on adding to the population. The result is race suicide. In rejoinder Mr. Hewlett declares:

"There is one class or nation of men which he has lost sight of altogether, and that is the peasantry. So long as that class can be contentedly settled here, with sons to marry and daughters to be married, there is no fear of degeneration. That brings me to a most curious conclusion; for that nation of men, which may be our last, was also our first. The peasantry in this island has survived some two thousand years of servitude; and though it is now relatively small, it is not so small but that it can replenish our country. . . . Every successive invasion of Britain has left its mark upon the peasantry; but the stock was never exterminated, the stock survives; and at this latest day the men of the county regiments who outstood the attempted invasion of the German hordes can trace their descent, through sire or dam, to the people who were here before Stonehenge was raised by Celtic colonists. They are, as it were, the very stone crop, the flowers of the field. . . . Their faults are obvious, most of them traceable to wretchedness and oppression. . . . But for their virtues—let those of our village men stand as they are written in the history of the Four Years' War."

So much for his faith in the rural fiber of the English people; in the chapter headed "The Remnant" Mr. Hewlett draws his conclusions as to whom that remnant of England's population will consist of if the needs of the present Government drive capital into withdrawal oversea, leaving England alone. "With it must depart those who live upon it, all the industrial workmen who cannot do without it. . . . The remnant will consist of those, firstly, so rooted in the soil of England that they cannot be torn out of it; our agricultural, fishing, seafaring, small trading population, the first here, the last to go, the soundest, healthiest, steadiest, most laborious, most patient of the nation. They will be, as they have generally been, the nucleus. Others will be added to whom the call of tradition, ancestry, association and what we know as the heartstrings outvails that of luxury and ease; others, again, who have sentimental, religious, philosophical inklings of the blessings of poverty, chastity and obedience. . . . in fine, any class of men to which, when leisure of mind is in the balance, easy money is not the prime good. There's for the remnant!

Finding Youth's Fountain

FINDING YOUTH. By Nelson Andrews. Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press.

THIS is the story of how the modern Ponce de Leon discovered the Fountain of Youth. It is a story of success, of the success not of the young man battling energetically against tremendous odds, but of an apparently played out old man who gets his second wind in life, and advances by tremendous strides when seemingly he is "down and out." Harvey Allen, the hero of this evidently autobiographical tale, is discharged at the age of 60 from the printing establishment where he has been employed for years; he roams the streets for days in the vain search for work, and gradually sinks into the most abject despondency; then, when his bank account is almost at the zero point and his spirits are somewhat below zero, he receives a jolt of new life, imbibes fresh confidence in himself and in the world, and decides that he can succeed if but he will display a spirit of youth. From that time forth his rise is phenomenal; he secures the first position for which he applies, is eventually placed in charge of an entire printing establishment, at length secures wide publicity for his ideas concerning youthfulness, and in the end is made the head of a "Youthland Colony" which he establishes in California.

The outstanding feature of the book is the air of reality and of evident sincerity with which it is written. One may not fully agree with the author; one may believe that he has been guilty of a self-hypnotism which has led him to imagine his rejuvenation; yet one cannot but pay tribute to the genuinely hopeful and optimistic spirit in which the book is written, and cannot but admit that it authentically depicts a case in which a man has benefited himself immeasurably, if only by exchanging old delusions for new. Undoubtedly there are many who will derive help and encouragement from Harvey Allen's message of youthfulness and good cheer.

"Harlem Shadows," a volume of poems by a negro poet, Claude McKay, and with an introduction by Max Eastman will be published this month by Harcourt, Brace & Co.

Great Fairy Stories

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lightful child plays this winter. The few children in the house had a languid air of being educated; the many elders seemed enchanted.

Your true moralists hate compromise and perhaps they will mob me for another solution. Why not keep fairy tales away from children altogether, and let us publish some that seem to us not unworthy of the charming *genre*? We might label them "Not for nice little boys and girls to read, but to give to their mammas and papas." I am not so sure that the complex modern child (more complexed with the movies) likes fairy tales anyway. Recently I asked a class of young men at Columbia to tell me the story of "Cinderella." Only two out of twenty-four had ever heard of her. As they were all too old to have been exposed to the full fury of educational psychology, I am forced to assume that they had guessed they wouldn't care for that sort of stuff. "Gulliver's Travels" perhaps teaches that when you write marvel stories for adults, even when they are a stupendous arraignment of human society, they will find their last stronghold in the nursery; and "Alice in Wonderland" perhaps teaches that if you write artistically for children it is adults who will love you last and best. Compared to the permanent joy of the grown-up in "Jam yesterday and jam to-morrow, but never jam to-day" (so unpsychological, you know, to make sophisticated social comments to children!) the child's fleeting participation in the Mad Tea Party is a pallid affair.